



Thank you for downloading this document from the RMIT Research Repository.

The RMIT Research Repository is an open access database showcasing the research outputs of RMIT University researchers.

RMIT Research Repository: <http://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/>

Citation:

Phoewhawm, R and Moussa, M 2015, 'A Proposed Model for Enhancing the Performance and Learning in a Managerial Team', SIU Journal of Management, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-18.

See this record in the RMIT Research Repository at:

<https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/view/rmit:40170>

Version: Published Version

Copyright Statement: © N/A

Link to Published Version:

<http://ejournal.som.siu.ac.th/files/Rawee%20Mahmoud.pdf>

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE THIS PAGE

A Proposed Model for Enhancing the Performance and Learning in a Managerial Team

Ravee Phoewhawm and Mahmoud Moussa

Abstract

One of the greatest challenges of being competitive in the long run that any company faces is in sustaining the morale of a managerial team to produce the desired outcomes. There will be times when members of the team have to be confronted with challenging issues such as holding each other accountable or painstakingly keeping anxiety at a moderate level during a heated debate. This study proposes a model for forming and learning as a managerial team by pinpointing the issues of upholding morale, coordinating the capabilities of team members and being equipped to deal with the changes in the work process. However, with so many uncontrolled dynamics in the working environment, the proposed model is effective when members are truly focused on obtaining results.

Keywords: *communication, consensus, experimentation, execution, learning.*

Authors:

Dr. Ravee Phoewhawm is a lecturer at the International Business Management program at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Thailand. Email: rtem999@yahoo.com.

Mahmoud Moussa is a lecturer at the International Business Management programme at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Thailand. Email: rmutlhrd@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

For a team of managers working in a company where it has to adapt constantly in a changing business environment, continual change is necessary to prevent atrophy in learning and effective performance as a group (Marcus, 2011). A managerial team is formed to be entrusted with its organization's purpose of upholding the values as well as leveraging the resources to ensure competitiveness, resiliency and longevity for the future (Schilling, 2010). Consequently, such a team has to execute with a collective state of mind situations where individual members form and learn by being firmly aligned, questioning their methods and using analysis to attain the desired outcome (Kinicki & Williams, 2011).

1.1. Forming and Learning as a Managerial Team in a Changing Business Environment

One of the greatest challenges of being competitive in the long run that any company faces is in sustaining the morale of a managerial team to produce the desired outcome (Divakaran, Mani & Post, 2012). The focus is on coordinating the diverse knowledge, skills, abilities and perspectives of team members to keep pace with abrupt changes and interacting with others to develop group proficiencies (Hackman, 2011). Simultaneously, the working conditions must support collaboration, being aware of the actions taken and solving problems in a more creative manner (Wang, 2006). There will be times when members of the team have to be confronted with challenging issues such as holding each other accountable or painstakingly keeping anxiety at a moderate level during a heated debate (Levin, 2011). However, a collective effort is strongly urged in converting this situation into a productive experience that helps the team to become fully equipped in managing the changes involved (Marquardt, 2011).

1.2. Research Questions

The authors of this work attempt to address the following questions concerning enhancing performance and learning in a managerial team:

1. How should morale be upheld?
2. What is the proper design for coordinating the capabilities of team members?
3. What should be the outlook design for people to be equipped to deal with the changes involved?

1.3. Research Objective

The aim of this research is to construct a model for enhancing performance and learning in a managerial team by upholding morale, designing a work flow for coordinating the capabilities of team members and providing an outlook for people to be equipped to deal with the changes involved.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Establishing a Sound Flow of Communication

A sound flow of communication involves the idea of making it safe for team members to admit to their shortcomings while other members are taking the initiative to learn about the event and search for the next steps of action to rectify the matter (Edmondson, 2011). Individual members of the team are asked to reflect on the obstacles they faced and make a concerted effort to think of possibilities (Biloslavo, 2005) for attaining the objectives. Communication becomes a sound flow when team members are encouraged to reflect on what, where, when and how (Yeo, 2008) rather than spending time on thinking about what caused the problem in the first place.

2.2. Providing Reasons

According to Schilling (2010:252), "... the great strength of the house of quality is that it provides a common language and framework within which the members of a project team may interact. The house of quality makes the relationship between product attributes and customer requirements very clear, it focuses on design trade-offs, it highlights the competitive shortcomings of the company's existing products, and it helps in identifying what steps need to be taken to improve them."

2.3. Experimenting with the Decisions Made

The aim of conducting trials and tests is to evaluate the decisions that were made and to seek for further improvement (West & Bamford, 2010). Teams may have to take on a deliberately experimental approach to clarify the key processes that have led to their decisions while at the same time anticipating and removing barriers that can disrupt the effort to learn from their failures and treat them as the subject of ongoing research (Edmondson & Cannon, 2004).

3. Case Analysis

A case analysis was applied on an event at a manufacturing company where the managerial team was struggling to regain its level of performance in complying with the organization's philosophy and mission statement. This is, therefore, a case of a managerial team's effort in forming and learning together.

3.1. Background of the Study

To protect the integrity of all stakeholders and the company's reputation for quality in what is a very competitive industry, the company will be referred to as the "Megatronics Company."

Based in the Lamphun province of northern Thailand, Megatronics is a manufacturing company that specializes in producing electrical components. The company relies on its departmental managers to work as a team in order to fulfill two objectives – “... the company’s philosophy of delivering quality and the mission statement of attaining the highest benefit for the customers.” Established in 1999, the company set the standard for work practice and customer service in its early years.

3.2. A Team Lacking Teamwork

As 2010 approached, the team studied started to experience some problems in functioning as a team. While the problems were mounting, the motivation to work as a truly defined team started to wane. All the while, the company’s managing director and human resources manager claimed that the philosophy and mission of the corporation could be attained if the managers were able to work as a complete team. However, rather than standing as a strong unit, some team members opted not to fully get involved for fear of the possible repercussions; that is, there was a lack of support for the concept. Some of the members stood by the sidelines and abandoned hope for change while leaving the more vocal team members to make spontaneous contributions. The human resources manager had to arrange a special meeting to help the managerial team gather its thoughts and realign its behaviour with the company’s philosophy and mission.

3.3. Defining the Root Cause

In an interview with the managing director of Megatronics, he perceived that there were many problems among the departmental managers in trying to work as a team. He felt that there were dysfunctional working relationships as individual team members focused more on who was at fault rather than finding a solution. He also perceived that they were not complying with the company’s

foundations by being careless in delivering finished goods that did not match customer orders. In addition, the managing director stated that the team was lacking in collaborative behaviour in developing a better method for problem-solving. Furthermore, the managing director sensed that the team was not willing to share ideas, information or knowledge with each other despite asking each of them to do so when he had a meeting with them.

The next interviews were conducted with managerial team members to obtain their version of the problems being experienced directly. They provided further information by presenting workplace issues that they had to overcome. First, they mentioned that they were unable to obtain accurate and confirmed information due to fellow team members not wanting to be held responsible for negative outcomes caused by the product. Second, they had experience in not having enough time to agree on an exact schedule for finishing a project because of hidden tasks that required prompt completion. Third, they sometimes had to compromise the quality of work in order to meet with the pressures of demands from their customers who were urging quick delivery.

Based on observation of one of the managerial team's meetings, the issue of rushing to get things done forced the managers to get their assignments finished as soon as possible because of the hectic schedule. By rushing the process, the products manufactured were often returned as below quality and were heavily criticized by the receiving customers.

The staff did have a team but they were lacking in teamwork. Members were not able to come together and exchange ideas and probe for solutions due to being bombarded with problems that hindered their ability to meet the schedule. Some members stayed silent about problems and hoped that the matters would be resolved by somebody else. Challenges and problems were sometimes abandoned when people did not wish to exhibit the strong will and effort

necessary to manage the situation. It was somewhat ironic to see the managerial team working effectively when it was conditions of fear and anger that forced them to work together. The former made people scared of losing their job or being reprimanded, while the latter was a cause of emotional frustration for top management. Not only was there a sense of being intimidated for rapidly providing information but people also had to endure being chastised for not giving accurate information. While the problems continued to mount, it resulted in mental strain and physical anguish for some of the managerial team members who wanted to improve their team's performance. As a result, teamwork and morale could not flourish.

3.4. Change of Outlook and Approach towards Working and Learning Together

At a managerial team meeting focusing on achieving high quality, members of the team were asked to reflect on the current operational system. A roundtable discussion was established to obtain their insights on what was working and what was not working, as well as the reasons for this. Each team member was given a chance to express a personal view of the operational system. Since there was evidence that people were not able to obtain accurate and confirmed information, which led to some mistakes and errors, the aim was to get the managerial team thinking about how to serve internal customers (i.e. fellow departmental colleagues) better so that everybody can work with a sense of professional dignity. It was proposed to the managers that they come up with an improved work design model that incorporates the Megatronic company's philosophy and mission.

The issue of concern for some team members was having enough time to ensure that the project could be completed on schedule. In general, there needs to be a session where everyone can come together and provide valuable inputs in ensuring that the project will be done with appropriate quality and on time. The managerial team felt that there

should be a pre-assessment meeting to address the following questions: What are the technical issues? What are the procurement issues? What are the production issues? And what are the profit-margin issues?

The team had to come up with an ideal working system or model that will allow all of them to obtain accurate information so they can perform to the best of their abilities to achieve the stated objective, for example: delivering on-time, with suitable levels of quality or enhanced satisfaction for the (internal/external) customers. It was agreed among the managerial team members that this working system should uphold the values of people being in high spirits, being challenged, honest, responsible, aware of the need for self-improvement and respect, experiencing job-satisfaction and maintaining teamwork. In order for them to achieve the outcome of quality, they all agreed that they want to work in an environment where the original working model produces a positive currency of working relationship values. This model is presented below:

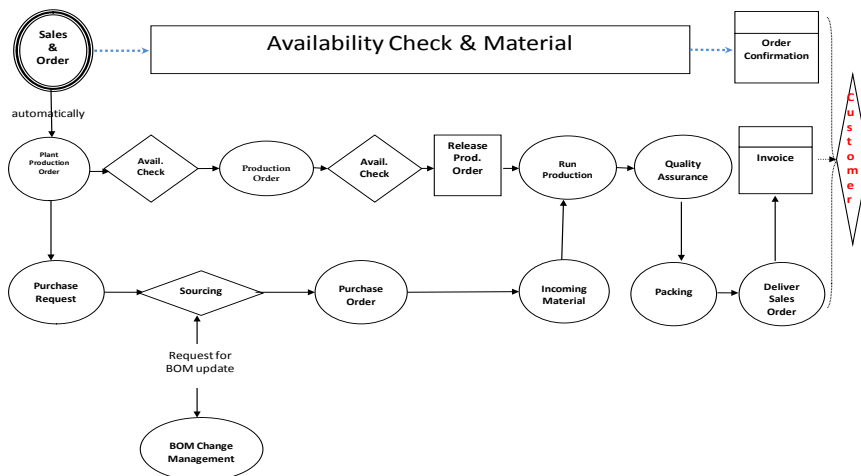


Figure 1: *The Original Working Model; source: Original Research*

3.5. Working and Learning Together in a Modified Direction

Upon review and reflection as a group, the managerial team discovered that the problem was not so much a question based on resources or policies but rather the way that the work flow was designed. According to the members, it seems that the original working design was completely outmoded and could not reinvented according to the demands from customers for high quality. Worse, the old work design did not provide the mental infrastructure for the team to enhance their teamwork or allow time to examine the root causes of the problems being experienced. The team believed that it was time to take control of the situation before the situation starts to control the team's performance. A working model was put forward so as to try to achieve consensus and then determine if this project could be managed accordingly and then an execution stage to come to an understanding and, hence, demonstrate commitment to the project.

There is, therefore, first a consensus stage and, second, an execution stage.

The purpose of the consensus stage was to:

- Obtain information that is accurate and confirmed;
- Identify issues that are of concern and rectify them as soon as possible;
- Set an agreed plan for action.

In this stage, quality is defined and drawn so that team members know the appropriate action to be taken. This would be the mission that is upheld from the very beginning. The execution stage ensures that all involved members have made a commitment to finishing the project. This stage also allows the staff to address any arising and/or existing problems that must be taken care of so that the project will be completed on schedule.

The newly designed working model was not intended just for the configuration of the duties and roles of those involved but was also built for the purpose of integrating the positive elements of the working relationship into daily procedures. In reality, this work design model was made for the managerial team to continue to move forward and provide the capacity to overcome difficult and challenging situations. At the same time, the model is for sustaining teamwork and having the different forms of behaviour aligned for producing an outcome with the company's mission embedded into every piece of the finished products. The managerial team agreed that the work being done, from start to finish, must meet with requisite quality standards otherwise the product will be rejected.

With the new approach, before any production can be fully completed, the team should get together to create a covenant; that is, an

agreement to which everyone agrees and means they are fully aware of what is occurring and what are the right actions to take to complete the project with the necessary level of quality. Consequently, the administration of the consensus stage will enable the team to discuss any matters that are of concern or issues to be resolved before operation is fully implemented. The consensus stage is a philosophy in itself which brings the knowledge and skills of others to be in unison in directing the project, along with meeting the quality and standards that the company wishes to uphold.

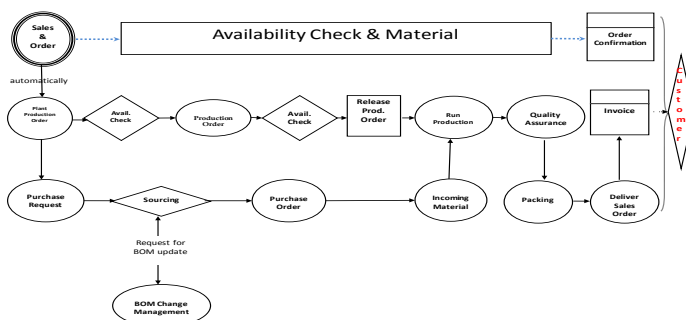


Figure 2: *Adapted Working Model; source: Original Research*

Figure 2 above depicts the consensus stage commencing at the point of sales and ordering. This stage gathers the managerial team for a series of meetings to discuss the selection, initiation, planning and execution of research and development projects, as well as devising a plan based on information gathered about relevant problems and the master data process for new projects, in addition to pointing out issues of concern in completing the old projects that were analyzed from the individual, production, procurement and resources perspectives. The consensus stage scans for any problems that are either about to occur, have been occurring or are occurring asymmetrically. This stage allows the managerial team to take the initiative in managing the

problems so that they will be contained and/or eliminated from the operation. Team members are free not only to discuss the issues at hand but are also encouraged to offer an investigative report on why these problems are happening. In addition, the individual members of the team are asked to provide some sort of solution for resolving the matter. This gives a chance for the team to stride forward in improving the procurement operation and to have the opportunity to unite as a team to complete standard quality work.

The consensus stage is a philosophical approach to team learning that is conducive to their working environment. Hence, it creates the conditions for team members to acquire the ability to learn together to accomplish a goal, to be responsible for making a contribution to achieving goals, to reflect on collaborative efforts and to decide on ways to improve effectiveness and develop interpersonal skills. This operational framework is composed of three integrative phases which then change to final confirmation of the process before entering the execution stage.

4. Results: A Meltdown in Learning as a Managerial Team

Despite efforts to create an effective approach to working and learning together, the new work design model was abandoned after a couple of months and reconstructed in a way that enabled higher authorities to oversee all operations. Upon obtaining feedback from one of the managerial team members, it was stated that: "There was not much of a sense of connection among team members as they tried to fix their own problems that were occurring in their task assignments. With problems present in the workplace, each individual team member adapted themselves to the situation by treating the problems on their own so as to sustain what they felt were their working responsibilities". Upon further elaboration, the respondent observed that the members were mostly "... dealing with the problems on their

own rather as a team, which made the team members deviate from taking accountability to apply their talent, skills and ability in strengthening the existing teamwork.” It was revealed, in other words, that the team had resorted back to its previous working behaviour and this was detrimental to the team’s performance as a whole.

5. Discussion and Implications

The style of communication should set the level of expectation for members of the managerial team so that they can reflect, analyze or discuss events which will challenge the conventional paradigm of working as a team without being pressured to produce. It would have been useful for members to draw out their mental ideas by performing a vivid demonstration of what is deemed acceptable performance while requesting improvement on the least desirable performance within the operational framework.

If quality is the main reason for working in such a formation then it would have been helpful for the managerial team to ensure that they are functioning in an operational system that makes everyone accountable to others and to have direct access to accurate and confirmed information, while having enough time to agree on an exact schedule in finishing the project and not having to compromise on quality so that the team as a whole can learn how to stay strongly focused on delivering high levels of quality on a consistent basis.

Experimenting with the decisions made was a good way for the managerial team to reassess their performance as well as acquiring the facts and figures to determine where the next steps can be taken for general improvement. However, this concept requires strong commitment and support from all colleagues within the team. In this case, the focus and energy became diluted in the working environment, which kept the pressure on to produce swiftly. With the lack of behavioural maintenance to fulfill this experimental approach, it appears that it becomes just another task assignment that nobody

wants to take because it is perceived to be an inconvenience that will occupy too much time and preventing the completion of work.

6. Recommendations

There was a team but there was a lack of teamwork in the effort to adapt to a new challenge. The proposed model for forming and learning as a managerial team is one in keeping with the mental behaviour of the team firmly aligned so that they are able to concentrate their efforts in following through both consensus and execution. In the case of this manufacturing company, for example, the affirmation would be that the team has collectively brought about an agreement (i.e. consensus) to be highly focused on the company's philosophy of delivering high quality and the mission statement of attaining the highest benefit for the customers before carrying out all orders, while preventing work disruptions from affecting their working performance. First and foremost, the managerial team stays committed to the philosophy and mission by fostering a mental code for team performance behaviour. Even with a revised working design model, the team would have to ask themselves about the issue of 'delivering quality and attaining the highest benefit for the customers.' The questions involved are as follows: "How can we get a sound flow of communication established in the working process? How can reason be applied at the moment of pressure? How can we be strongly committed to experimenting with our decisions?" Figure 3 below indicates the model for forming and learning as a managerial team for the sake of being aligned to complete the execution of the consensus.

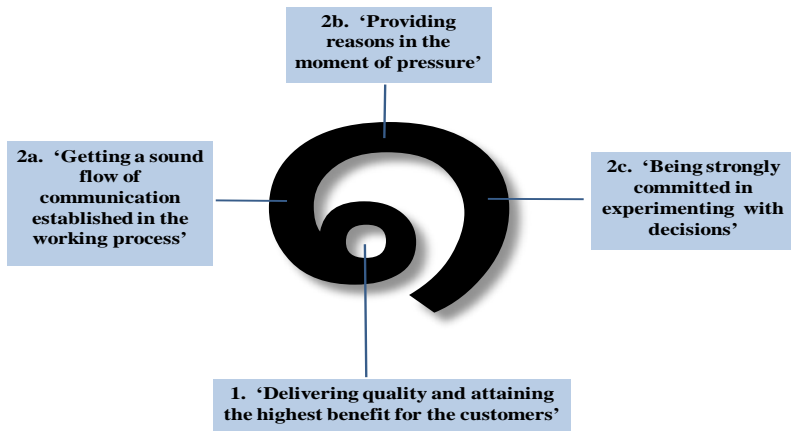


Figure 3: *Model for Forming and Learning as a Managerial Team;*
source: *Original Research*

The figure above incorporates the ancient Thai numeral one. The form represents the origin or the starting point of things that are about to become and then swirls around that point with questions, practical issues or other topics in order to allow the users to apply the relevant theory. In this analogy, it is a model for forming and learning as a managerial team where the point of origin is an empty hole that represents the ability of members to direct their efforts to meeting the designated objectives. In this regard, the managerial team is highly concentrated on 'delivering quality and attaining the highest benefit for the customers.' This is the conviction of the managerial team in what it has set out to do and then seeing to it that it becomes attained. In order to make it happen, the team has to set a mental code for team performance behaviour by setting the conditions that will make fellow colleagues comply in a professional manner. With the focus intact, members coordinate their capabilities to configure the methods of obtaining a sound flow of communication which can be embedded in the working process, thereby providing reasons in the moment of

pressure and being strongly committed to experimenting with decisions so that the team remains firmly aligned while at the same time undergoing a process of creating consensus and conducting the execution of the project. This model is also a process for being equipped in forming and learning as a managerial team whenever abrupt changes occur in their current work flow operations. Above all, the model demonstrates that the aim to be accomplished with the conceptual applications indicated can be achieved without being overwhelmed by any technical disruptions.

With an attempt to offer a model for enhancing the performance and learning of a managerial team, the authors of this study have pointed out the issues of upholding morale, coordinating the capabilities of team members and being equipped to deal with change. To generate a sense of collective effort in assisting the managerial team to achieve its objective, the concepts of creating a sound flow of communication, providing reasons and experimenting with the decisions were provided to enable the conditions of forming and learning endured within the consensus and execution processes. However, with so many uncontrolled dynamics in the working environment, such as working attitudes and behaviour, the model can only bring out the desired results when the mental fortitude of team members is appropriate. In other words, the proposed model for enhancing the performance and learning in a managerial team is effective when individual team members are highly committed to doing their utmost best to achieve results, even in the face of adversity.

7. References

- Biloslavo, R. (2005). Use of the knowledge management framework as a tool for innovation capability audit, *International Journal of Innovation and Learning*, 2(4), 402–424.
- Divakaran, A., Mani, M. & Post, L. (2012). Building a global pipeline: Finding, developing, and retaining tomorrow's

manufacturing workforce, Booz & Company, available at: http://www.booz.com/global/home/what_we_think/reports_and_white_papers/ic-display/50643956.

Edmondson, A. (2011). Strategies for learning from failure, *Harvard Business Review*, 89(4), 48–55.

Edmondson, A. & Cannon, M. (2004). Failing to learn and learning to fail (intelligently): How great organizations put failure to work to improve and innovate, *Harvard Business School Working Papers*, available at: <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/5434.html>.

Hackman, R.J. (2011). *Collaborative intelligence: Using teams to solve hard problems*, San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers.

Kinicki, A., & Williams, B.K. (2011). *Management: A practical introduction* (5th edition.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Inc.

Levin, L. (2011). *Top teaming: A roadmap for leadership teams, navigating the now, the new, and the next*, Indiana, IN: iUniverse.

Marcus, A. (2011). *Management strategy: Achieving sustained competitive advantage* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Inc.

Marquardt, M. (2011). *Building the learning organization: Achieving strategic advantage through a commitment to learning* (3rd ed.), Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Schilling, M.A. (2010). *Strategic management of technological innovation* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Inc.

Wang, P. (2006). Human resources management plays a new role in learning organizations, *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 2(2), 52-6.

West, G.P., & Bamford, C.E. (2010). *Strategy: Sustainable advantage and performance*. Independence, KY: South-Western Cengage Learning.

Yeo, R. (2008). Identifying the competitive sword: Learning to be cutting-edge for organizational development, *Business Strategy Series*, 9(1), 30–36.